



play the odds that love will win by frankenstina

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, Enemies to Friends, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, Friends With Benefits, Friends to Lovers, Fuckbuddies, Homophobic Language, Idiots in Love, Implied Sexual Content, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Internalized Homophobia, Las Vegas, Las Vegas Wedding, Los Angeles, M/M, Mild Angst, Mutual Pining, Road Trips, Steve Harrington Has a Crush on Billy Hargrove, are the strange things there? who knows?, certainly not me, did i miss anything, everyone else is so done with their bs, gratuitous Queen references because I love Queen therefore so do the characters I write, i'll get back to this, idiots to lovers, is it a modern au? who knows?, oh yh harrington head to california, probably, this one's for the bisexuals

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Billy Hargrove's Mother, Carol Perkins, Heather Holloway, Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Original Female Character(s), Steve Harrington, Tommy Hagan

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Summary:

Wedding vows in Vegas aren't meant to last for ages, but Steve is willing to gamble on Billy Hargrove.

play the odds that love will win

Author's Note:

- like a god looking down on their people, I surveyed my ships and asked myself, “which buffoons are most likely to have a drunk Vegas wedding?”
- these.



it is these buffoons.

- this can be interpreted both as taking place in the in-universe timeline, or as a modern AU. gay marriage was legalized in 2014 in Nevada, if I'm not wrong, but I've left the other details vague enough for you to take it as you fancy.
- title from *Wedding Vows in Vegas* by Was (Not Was).
- *throws this fic at you like a monkey flinging poo* here! consume my shit!

Steve wakes up to find that his body has staged an outright mutiny against him.

Last night comes back in technicolor flashes, with a concerning gap in his memory after 10 PM. It shouldn't surprise him, he reckons dimly, because the last thing he remembers is Billy's wicked grin as he orders another round of shots. *“Bottoms up, pretty boy,”* says the Billy of his memories, face painted in neon lights, and Steve's never been the best at turning down Billy Hargrove.

His brain has decided that it's had enough of his cranium, and wants out. His legs have given up on him as well, and are currently aiming to tear themselves out of their sockets. And there's a dull throb in his lower back that suggests the rearrangement of several internal

organs.

Fucking hell.

When his headache has subsided to a dull throb, he pinches one eye open. Sunlight assaults his retinas with complete disregard for his current fragility. He brings up a hand to protect himself, then stops midway when the light catches on the silver band encircling his finger.

He squints at the ring. *HAWKINS HIGH* is engraved on one side, but the date that follows is a year after he graduated.

Water stops running behind a door. Steve takes note of this detachedly until the door opens, and a girl walks out.

She catches him staring, and her lips twitch upwards. “Oh, so *now* you’re interested.”

Which- doesn’t make sense at all, really. She’s objectively gorgeous, and Steve finds it hard to believe he hadn’t been all over her before. “What?” he says intelligently.

She laughs. “Can’t blame you.” Her smile gets a little rueful. “Not with Blondie all up in your business. I’d get distracted, too.”

Steve’s still staring at her with what is no doubt an absolutely charming expression, while sirens go off in his head. *Who the hell is Blondie, and how is she prettier than you?*

He gets the sinking sensation that quite a lot went down after 10 PM.

“I’d better be off.” She gathers up the rest of her stuff; a purse on the bedside cabinet, a pair of pumps placed carefully by the door. Steve’s own clothes are scattered all over the place. “All the best to both of you,” she adds, unaware that she’s leaving him with more questions than answers.

Steve stares at the door for another beat, and then he swings his legs over the side of the bed. He stands up.

Pain shoots up his spine immediately, and he buckles over. His eyes

fall to the bruises on his thighs, on his hips, all over his waist. It's probably for the best that he can't see his behind. Jesus.

He winces on every step. It takes great effort to make his way to the en suite, and even greater effort to not keel over.

What he sees in the mirror nearly makes him pass out, anyway.

He's been *mauled*; there's no other way to put it. Love bites pepper his skin all the way from his neck to his chest. He's honestly amazed his nipples haven't been torn clean off.

Blondie, he decides, must be a lion.

The thought triggers another flash of remembrance- a head of wild golden hair between his legs, his back arching off the bed- and he staggers forward, blindly reaching out to clutch the edges of the sink.

Jesus.

A shower lets him know that he's sore all over. He discovers hickeys in abundance, and his *derrière* is suspiciously sensitive. He limps to his suitcase and grabs a pair of chinos and a polo, then limps his way out of the hotel room.

The others have occupied a table at the farthest corner of the dining hall, and Steve laments his sore everything once more before forcing himself to put one foot in front of the other.

It's Tommy who sees him first. He grins all over his face and digs an elbow into Billy's side, crowing, "There's the missus!"

Which is just. The weirdest way to say 'good morning'.

Steve puts it down to Tommy's warped sense of humor, and moves to slide into the free seat between Nancy and Carol. But Tommy bounds out of his chair in an instant, grabbing Steve by his shoulders and forcing him down. "You gotta sit here, buddy," Tommy says, grinning from ear to ear. "It's only proper."

Steve casts him a bemused look. Between them, Carol rolls her eyes, but a smile plays on her lips.

Actually... Tommy and Carol are the only ones smiling. Nancy's face is like thunder, and Jonathan's nervous eyes dart all around the table. Billy won't even look at him. He tries not to let that last one sting too much.

"What's up, guys?" He glances at Billy again, who's hiding behind a curtain of blond hair. He's got a white-knuckled grip on a glass of water, and a silver band Steve's awfully familiar with on his left hand. "Hey, that's my class ring."

Carol makes a strange noise, something between a groan and a snort of laughter. Tommy's vibrating at a frequency high enough to shatter glass. Jonathan's nervous eyes fall on Steve.

It's Nancy who breaks the silence. She slides a rumpled piece of paper across the table with an icy, "I think you need to have a look at this."

Steve has never been the best of readers, so it takes him several tries to convince himself that yes, the squiggly font printed at the top does spell out *Certificate of Marriage*.

It's the next line, however, that makes him certain his eyes are playing tricks on him.

Steve's copied off of Billy enough times to recognize his surprisingly neat penmanship, even without processing the *William Hargrove* it spells out. It's rather embarrassing to see his own childish scrawl on the other dotted line.

He freezes. Rereads the document at an agonizingly slow pace. Contemplates shoving his head in a blender.

"This isn't..." He swallows, holding the document up. "This isn't, like. Legitimate. Right?"

"Oh, it's plenty legit." Tommy yanks the document out of Steve's hands- not that Steve is in any state to put up a fight. "*This is to certify that William Hargrove and Steve Harrington were united in holy matrimony at Little Vegas Chapel, Las Vegas-*"

Nancy's got fire in her eyes and fire on her tongue, but Billy beats her to the chase. "Shut the fuck up, Hagan," he groused, and Tommy

does, for once.

Steve remembers the same rumble in Billy's voice, cutting off in a groan. *"Baby, you feel so good."*

His own voice, at an almost girlish pitch. *"Oh, please! Right there!"*

Christ.

And after all that, Billy still won't look at him. Steve refuses to let it bother him. Or tries to, anyway. "But we were wasted. Doesn't that count for something?"

Tommy, because he's Tommy, can't keep his mouth shut for too long. It would be the eighth wonder of the world if he did. Seventh, maybe, because even the Pyramids of Giza can't hold a candle to Tommy being quiet. "Hargrove looked pretty damn happy when he saw his blushing bride."

Billy's head snaps up, fury etched all over his handsome features. Nancy takes the victory this time. "I can't believe you let them go through with this!" she hisses. "You were supposed to look out for them!"

"Whoa there, Nelly." A tinge of annoyance bleeds into Tommy's voice. "We weren't supposed to do jackshit. Carol and I were just as shitfaced as these two morons. 'Sides," he adds, with a sly little grin, "Where were *you* last night?" Nancy's flush deepens. She looks like a furious strawberry. "You were sober. Or, well, as sober as can be to hook up with Byers."

Jonathan shifts uncomfortably, and the wound in Steve's heart has healed enough to speak up for the guy. "Don't be a jackass, Tommy."

"I'm just joshing around, Steve-o." Tommy grins wickedly, and Steve's beginning to regret sticking up for Jonathan, because now Steve is Tommy's target. He should be used to it after all these years, but Tommy has a penchant for finding new and creative ways to be a veritable pain in his ass. Probably has a bachelor's in the thing; some grand document declaring *Awarded to Thomas Hagan, for Being the Bane of Steve Harrington's Existence.*

Which gets him thinking about other documents. Ones that say he's married Billy Hargrove, for instance.

"So, who took it up the ass?" Tommy leans forward with a smarmy grin. "My money's on Harrington."

Billy pushes his chair back with a grating screech. He storms off without a word.

Tommy gapes at Billy's receding figure, then at Steve. "*Hargrove bottomed?*"

"You're disgusting, Tommy," Nancy snaps.

Carol's eyes flick to her. "Watch it, princess."

Nancy hardly looks mollified, but even she knows better than to pick a fight with Carol. She gets to her feet instead, eyes on Steve. "Outside," she says, and it's not a question.

Steve looks at Jonathan, who only shrugs helplessly. Tommy pulls a face, and Carol offers a wry smile. *Good luck*, she mouths, and Steve kind of wants to kiss her.

Would that be considered adultery?

He follows the trail of Nancy's floral perfume. *Jasmine. Something tropical.* Something you would never find on Nancy's vanity when they were dating.

Nancy's got a cigarette between her teeth when he steps outside. Unbidden, he compares it to Billy, who could out-smoke a steam engine. Completes his whole rockstar getup; the hair, the earring, the tattoos. The cigarette.

For Nancy, it juxtaposes her... everything.

Also unbidden, his mind adds: *Billy wears it better.*

Nancy misinterprets his silence. "Picked it up from Joyce after one too many nights at the Byers'." Steve waits for the hurt. It doesn't come. "Tried to quit cold turkey a couple times, but." She shrugs.

“Stress relief, I guess.”

Steve side-eyes her. “*You’re stressed?*” He acts surprised, all googly-eyed and slack-jawed. “You? Nancy Wheeler?”

“Oh, har, har.” She rolls her eyes. “And you’re not helping, either.”

“That’s a little harsh.”

“That’s all you have to say for yourself?” She looks pissed, which is-kind of fucking golden, to say the least. *She* didn’t get hitched to a guy who broke a plate over her head. “That’s it?”

“Well, what do you want me to say?” He gives her a look.

“You could be a little more concerned, for starters!”

“What difference will it make?”

“So you’re *okay* with this?” *Incredulous*. That’s an SAT word. *Dubious, skeptical, disbelieving*. “You married *Billy Hargrove!*”

“Thanks. Was not aware.”

Peeved. There’s another one. *Nettled, roiled, agitated*. “You’re unbelievable, do you know that?” She narrows her eyes all of a sudden. “Wait- you don’t *like* him, do you?”

Odium. Abhorrence, execration, disgust.

“He *is* my husband.” Steve goes for a jokey-joke tone, a little, *ha-ha, can you fucking believe it?* It comes out sounding a whole lot more pathetic.

“He *is* a douchebag!” She throws her hands in the air. “And he’s going to break your heart!”

Peeved. Nettled, roiled, agitated. Like you did?”

She reels back. “Steve, I- that’s not fair.”

“It’s not?” He crosses his arms over his chest. “You know what’s not fucking fair? You acting like you have any say in this. I fucked up,

alright? You think I don't know that? But I'm not alone in this." He holds his hand in front of her, Billy's ring a heavy weight around his finger. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to find my husband."



Steve's been hovering outside Billy's door like some creep for the past five minutes. He raises a fist for the nth time, then chickens out at the last moment.

Either the hotel's invested in soundproof walls, or Billy's being deathly quiet. Which is, like, the exact antithesis of Billy's whole persona. Steve's been trying to hear something, anything from inside, to no avail.

God, he thinks. I've turned into Jonathan Byers.

The door swings open, and Steve comes face-to-face with Billy's tired glare. "You comin' in, Harrington? Could hear you thinking through the walls."

"Yeah, sure," Steve replies, a beat too late.

Billy takes a step back wordlessly, and Steve inches inside. He steps over half the contents of Billy's suitcase strewn across the floor.

The other half lies folded atop the bed.

"Figured you'd wanna get out of here as soon as possible." Billy tosses a pair of boxers into his suitcase. "We can make it to the airport by noon."

Steve stares. "The hell are you talking about?"

Billy balls up a shirt. It sails over Steve's head, unfurling halfway but landing cleanly in the suitcase. *Slam dunk.* "Your mom's a lawyer, isn't she? Bet she'll get the job done for us in a New York minute. Dame Harrington wouldn't want her sweet little boy gettin' too corrupted by white trash." He wads a sock. "And hey, I'd appreciate it if we could keep my old man in the dark. Put me in the hospital for

kissing a boy; gonna be the morgue if he finds out I married one.”

He cracks a smile. Steve’s never heard anything less funny.

“The hell,” he says again, real slow like Billy’s stupid, “are you talking about?”

Now it’s Billy’s turn to look at him like he’s dense. “The divorce, numbnuts.”

Steve’s had his worldview flipped several times today. What’s one more? “We’re getting a divorce?”

Billy drops the sock. “We’re not?”

“We got married last night! It’s been, like, what? Ten hours? Twelve?”

“This about the ‘sanctity of marriage’, or whatever?” Billy’s grinning in that infuriating way of his, where he’s not really amused. Last time, Steve got his ass handed to him in the Byers’ kitchen. “Ain’t no sanctity ‘bout being a faggot.”

“Don’t say that word,” Steve snaps.

“What? Faggot?” Billy runs his tongue over his teeth. “Ain’t that what you are, Harrington?”

None of Joyce Byers’s porcelain is lying around. Steve reckons he could take Billy in a fight. “Like you’re one to talk, when you’ve had your dick inside me.”

Billy, honest to God, freezes. Goes rigid all over, stuck in this *Looney Tunes* pose; Wile E. Coyote running off a cliff. Gravity begins to work a full ten seconds later. “You remember last night?”

“Not everything,” Steve admits. “It comes back in these flashes, like. And it wasn’t too hard to figure out, honestly- I could barely fucking walk this morning.”

Despite his stiff shoulders, Billy manages a cocky grin. “Dicked you down that good, Harrington?”

“Jesus Christ.” Steve pinches the bridge of his nose. “Look, I can get my mom to help us un-fuck this, when we get back to Hawkins. But that’s two weeks from now, and-”

“Hold up. Two weeks?”

Billy, it appears, is on the verge of an aneurysm.

“You promised your mom we’d come, Billy. And I know you really wanted to see her.” Billy’s shoulders finally drop down, and an expression Steve would call affection on anyone else manifests on Billy’s face. “We’re just a state line away. We came this far.”

Billy mulls this over. “Sure you can handle me for that long, pretty boy?”

The familiar nickname eases a weight off Steve’s shoulders he didn’t even know he had. “Married you, didn’t I? For better or for worse.”

Billy’s tongue darts out, licking his lip. “Which one is this gonna be?”

Steve shoulder checks him as he walks out. “Guess we’ll just have to find out, won’t we?”

There’s that look on Billy’s face again, that thing so close to affection. “Guess we will.”



Steve rents a Beamer, much to Billy’s dismay.

“Pansy-ass car,” he bitches, while Steve loads their luggage to the back. “Made for fuckin’ wine moms and queers.”

Steve glares at him, unimpressed. It’s the same look Nancy levelled him with when the four of them left that morning, back to college (Tommy and Nancy) and their jobs (Carol and Jonathan). She hadn’t apologized after their fight; the unsaid *take care of yourself* in her eyes as good as he would get. Nancy Wheeler never apologizes.

Billy sends back a leer. He doesn't ever say sorry, either.

Is that my type? Steve banishes the dangerous thought immediately.

For all his bellyaching, Billy's irritatingly reluctant to give up the wheel. He's in the driver's seat by the time Steve finally gets the damn trunk closed, no thanks to his shithead of a husband, and refuses to move.

"You're such a pain," Steve gripes. Billy smirks, saccharine, and steps on the gas.

Their second fight as newlyweds is over the radio; particularly, what to play on it. Billy's squealing guitars and screaming men are the auditory equivalent of having a bat full of nails swinging into your family jewels. Billy denounces Steve's music taste as generic, banal, boring, and, quote unquote, '*the sorta shit the Chief goes down on Byers' mom to*'.

Steve is pretty sure he'd never stumbled across that last one in his SATs.

They settle on Queen (mostly because Billy threatens to throw Steve out on the highway if he dares to play a single Phil Collins track, and Steve isn't too keen on testing him). Freddie Mercury croons about finding somebody to love.

It's pure coincidence that Steve can't stop thinking about Billy.

Billy drums his fingers on the steering wheel in time to *Another One Bites the Dust*. By *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, he's bellowing his lungs out, trying to drown out Steve's off-key garbling.

"This thing called love," he hollers obnoxiously. *"I just can't handle it."*

"This thing called love; I must get 'round to it." Steve refuses to go down without a fight. It's practically their brand, at this point.

"I ain't ready." Billy's got a voice made for the stage. A face that could sell out arenas. *"Crazy little thing called love."*

Steve's voice breaks on the next line, and Billy cracks up. Steve's

singing (for lack of a better word) breaks off into a smile.

“There goes my baby.” He powers on, eyes on Billy. *“She knows how to rock ‘n’ roll.”*

“She drives me crazy.” Billy lowers his voice, makes it sexy. Sexier. *“She gives me a hot and cold fever.”*

He’s a vision in the afternoon sunlight; all golden hair and suntanned skin and eyes as blue as the ocean. A Metallica t-shirt stretched tight across his broad chest. Biting on a cigarette. Wind in his hair, sunshine on his face.

Leaves me in a cool, cool sweat.

Steve thinks, *I could get used to this.*

And that’s the most dangerous thought of all.



Billy’s mom is beautiful. Not like the European film star Vivian Harrington is, or even Southern belle Karen Wheeler. She’s more in Joyce Byers’s league; lovely in a way that transcends time- crow’s feet on the edges of sea-green eyes and a handful of gray hairs among the blonde, and she’s all the prettier for it.

“Billy!” She envelopes him in a bone-crushing hug right on the doorstep, which Billy is quick to reciprocate. “And you must be Steve! I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Steve tries to catch Billy’s eyes, but he seems equally as determined to avoid it. “All good things, I hope.”

“Only the best.” She steps back into the house. “Well, come on in, boys. Make yourselves at home. I’ve gotten Billy’s old room ready for you two- I’m afraid we don’t have a guest room.”

She looks embarrassed, and Steve regrets his rich-boy chinos and polo. “Oh, no, that’s perfectly fine, ma’am. We’ve slept together

before.” Which would’ve been awkward enough to say to someone’s mother on its own, but Steve feels the need to make it worse with, “In the same bed. Like. Sleeping together. Literally.”

He should’ve stuck his head in a blender.

Billy’s mom gives him a look that has Steve uncomfortable down to his rich-boy tennis shoes. “Then that’s settled,” she says at last. “Why don’t the two of you go freshen up? I’ll have dinner ready when you’re done. And please, Steve; call me Gwen.”

Billy waits until his mom’s gone to start snickering. “Real smooth, King Steve.”

Steve slugs him. “Asshole. What did you tell mommy about me?”

Billy’s face goes real pink, real quick. “Fuck off.”

They deposit their luggage in Billy’s childhood room. The walls are painted blue; glow-in-the-dark stars taped to the ceiling. Outside the window, waves crash against the shore.

With some squeezing, Steve reckons they’ll both fit on the bed.

“It ain’t much, but-”

Steve cuts in. “It’s perfect.”

Billy’s smile is one of his rarer ones, the ones Steve sees only when Billy thinks no one’s looking. All soft, like. Makes Steve get this stupid ache to kiss him.

He clears his throat instead. “Show me the bathroom?”

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Gwen makes a killer bolognese. She beams when Steve spoons several helpings onto his spaghetti. “Billy tells me you’re Italian.”

“His dad’s in the mob,” Billy pipes up.

Steve nods seriously. “He’s, like, the Godfather.”

“Sharks in his pool.”

“Diamond-encrusted bathroom fittings.”

“They’re filthy fuckin’ rich.” Billy’s grin splits his face in half. Steve can’t help but grin back. “’S why I married him.”

He goes stiff, and then the smile slides off his face altogether. Steve’s eyes go wide, flickering between Billy and Gwen.

Gwen sets her fork down carefully. “You’re married?” She sounds curious, maybe a little hurt. Not angry, though, so Steve counts it a blessing.

Billy still looks a little rattled. Steve reaches under the table and intertwines their fingers. He jolts, eyes darting to Steve’s for a fraction of a second, but his shoulders droop. “Yeah.” He clears his throat. Looks his mother in the eye. Takes a deep breath. “Last night.”

Gwen’s eyebrows shoot up. A shit-eating grin takes over her face. “Oh. Oh. You got married in Vegas.”

Steve tries to imagine his own mother having a similar reaction when they break the news. He fails spectacularly.

Billy groans. “Mom.”

“Should we break out the champagne?” she teases, already out of her seat. “Billy, you know where the nice glasses are.”

“*Mom.*”

Gwen swivels around, champagne and three tumblers balanced precariously in her hands. She sets them down on the table. “How long have you been together? Billy didn’t tell me-”

“*Mom!*” Billy snaps. “We’re not together, alright? We were drunk off our asses, and made a mistake. We’re gettin’ divorced when we get back to Hawkins.”

Gwen falters. “Oh. I’m sorry, I just thought-”

“Well, you thought wrong.” Billy stands up, hair obscuring his face. He sounds like he’s about to cry. “I need a fuckin’ smoke.”

He storms out for the second time in a day. The screen door slams shut behind him, and Gwen flinches.

Steve twirls a limp strand of spaghetti around his fork. His appetite’s gone with Billy. Which is such a shame because, for real, Gwen makes a *killer* bolognese.

Gwen sighs. “Sorry.”

Steve drops the fork. “It’s okay. I guess it’s a sore subject.” His laugh sounds fake. “It’s just. My fault, I guess. Billy wanted to get the divorce right away, but I figured we could wait.”

A crease forms between Gwen’s brows. “*Billy wanted the divorce?*”

“Yeah.” Steve shrugs. Pretends it doesn’t make him feel funny; kind of like his heart’s breaking.

But that’s ridiculous.

“And you didn’t?” Her frown deepens.

Steve shrugs again. “I mean, it’s not the worst that could’ve happened. My childhood best friend was there. Shit, my *ex*. And Billy’s-” *one in a million* “- a good guy.”

“He is.” There’s an odd look on her face. “You know, Billy can’t hide what he’s feels to save his life. He’s always been an open book.”

“He does have a shit poker face.” Billy’s arsenal of skills does not extend to Texas hold ‘em. Steve learned that the hard way.

Gwen fixes Steve with a look. “He’s pretty obvious with what goes through his head.”

“One of my own fatal flaws,” Steve admits.

Gwen stares at him. He squirms. “Yes, well...” she says at last. “You’re a lot more alike than you think.”

Which is, frankly, cryptic as fuck.

“Well, I’m beat.” She slaps her hands on her thighs, eyes bright and looking not the least bit tired. “I’m off to bed. Maybe you should get some rest too, sweetheart; you’ve had a long day.”

Steve nods. “I’ll check on Billy before I go.”

Gwen’s whole face lights up like a Christmas tree. “You do that.”

There’s a lone figure on the boardwalk. Steve makes his way over barefoot, fortunate enough to step on every jagged rock in his path.

Billy has a bottle in his hand, apparently captivated by its label. Steve shuffles his (blistered) feet awkwardly.

He gnaws on his lip. Runs a hand through his hair. Opens his mouth and utters the stupidest sentence known to mankind. “If my dad were in the mob, we wouldn’t be living in Hawkins.”

Steve Harrington, consummate conversationalist. They should give him his own radio show.

Billy’s looking at him now. It makes Steve feel all weird, like. Like maybe he’s not the only one whose heart is beating a little too fast. “Yeah?” Billy says at last, real slow. Indulging him. “Chicago, then, Al Capone?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of Cali.” Steve shoves his hands in his pockets. Sways a bit. “Like in the movies.”

“Like in the movies, huh?” Steve doesn’t have to look at Billy to know he’s grinning. It makes him a little warm inside.

“Yeah, y’know. Like *The Godfather*. The second one. *Scarface*.”

“*Scarface* is in Miami, dumbass.” But Billy’s laughing.

And Steve? Steve’s chest is a supernova.

He snatches the bottle from Billy to give at least an illusion of annoyance. He takes a giant swig, and regrets it immediately when it hits his tastebuds. “The fuck is this shit?”

“Pure fuel,” says Billy, grinning all over his stupid gorgeous face. “Pure fuckin’ fuel, pretty boy.”

“Tastes like lighter fluid.” Steve takes another swig. “And it burns like a motherfucker.”

Billy shrugs. “Gets the job done. Give me that.”

They pass the bottle back and forth in relative silence, but it’s not tense like before. Everything seems a little fuzzy around the edges. Steve’s hands. The sand between his toes. Billy’s lips.

Steve looks away. The stars aren’t as bright as they are in Hawkins, nor are there as many. Still. “It’s real pretty.”

Billy’s quiet. When Steve turns around, he’s looking right back.

He tastes like cheap vodka and pasta sauce. Steve can’t get enough.

This, he remembers- kissing Billy in front of a gaudy altar, Carol and Tommy wolf-whistling somewhere in the background. Kissing Billy again, in some hole-in-the-wall bar while a girl watches on. Stumbling into Steve’s hotel room, Billy crowding him against the wall, eyes ablaze; *“Sure you want this, pretty boy?”*- and Steve has never wanted anything more in his life.

Billy nibbles at the underside of his jaw, biting the skin hard enough to sting but not enough to leave a mark. Steve breathes in the seaspray, the salt, the smell of Billy’s shampoo. *Jasmine. Something tropical.* Billy wears this better, too.

And then Steve goes and puts his foot in his mouth.

“Why do you only kiss me when we’re wasted?” he asks.

The jasmine’s gone; cold air in its stead.

Billy’s eyes won’t meet his. The distance between them feels like a

mile. He teeters a bit on his feet, eyes a little red around the edges.

He doubles over and pukes.



The first time Steve sees Billy's dick, it's halfway down Bree Wexler's throat.

Nancy's "*This is bullshit, it's bullshit, you're bullshit,*" keeps ringing in his ears down Tina's stairs, over Duran Duran, through the throngs of sweaty teenagers, and all the way outside. He presses his hand to his chest, to his mouth, to his nose.

He's focusing most of his energy on trying not to cry, which is probably why he doesn't notice the car parked diagonally right in front of the Beamer until he falls into his driver's seat.

It's blocking his way completely. Steve peers over the windshield, California number plates taunting him. Of fucking course.

There's movement inside, and the light from a streetlamp catches on Hargrove's stupid rat mullet. Steve's knuckles stand white against the handle when he slams the door shut, stalking over to the Camaro.

Hargrove is in the backseat, head thrown back, stupid rat mullet all over the place. He tips his head to a side when Steve's shadow falls over him. He leers through the window.

It's then that Steve sees the girl between his thighs.

Bree had come to Tina's with her hair done all pretty, a brunette Marilyn, but there's not a trace of the elaborate hairdo left. Locks of dark hair are twisted between Hargrove's fingers, holding Bree's head in place while she chokes on his dick.

And Steve doesn't mean to. Stare. But, like. Well. No wonder Hargrove's got such a huge ego.

His eyes snap up, face on fire. Hargrove stares right back at him.

Steve stumbles back to his car, forcing himself to think about calculus, Jonathan Byers, the dead cat he saw on the side of the street on his way to school- anything except Hargrove, and his California-grown cock.

And it works. For two weeks.

Steve's jaw makes an odd sound when he opens it too wide. There's a scar on his temple the size of the Grand Canyon. There isn't a girl in Hawkins who'd want to kiss his bruise-mottled face. All thanks to Hargrove.

Tracey Kline's party bores him off the dancefloor, out of the kitchen, into a room where he plans to down the tequila he nicked from the Klines' liquor cabinet and pass out on the bed.

A plan that goes awry the minute he walks into the room.

It's Hargrove again. This time, it's Sheila Donahue. This time, he's taking her from behind.

This time, he calls out, "Harrington."

Steve tries very hard to not stare. It's an astronomical failure. "Sorry, I was gonna leave-"

Hargrove snaps his hips. Sheila moans. "That what you really want, *amigo*?"

Hargrove must've knocked something loose inside Steve; it's the only explanation for why he stays.

Afterwards, it's not so much of an accident as Steve knowing to follow Hargrove whenever he takes off with a girl. And when Steve can bring himself to talk to a girl without wishing she were Nancy, it happens the other way around, too.

Lacey, Mackenzie, Jennifer, Penelope- Steve forgets the ones after. Somewhere along the way, 'Hargrove' becomes 'Billy', and 'pretty boy' loses its bite.

The first time Billy kisses Steve, they've got a girl between them. The

morning after, he pretends to not remember.

Steve pretends it doesn't hurt.



Billy sleeps like the dead. Steve barely sleeps at all.

Gwen's landline blares a klaxon wail that has him falling out of bed, running outside before he's fully awake. It cuts off in the midst of him struggling to pull the random t-shirt he plucked off the ground over his head. Gwen's soft, "Hello?" breaks through the quiet.

She offers him a soft smile when he ambles into the hallway. Steve reciprocates through a yawn.

"Billy?" she mouths, and Steve closes his eyes in a mimicry of sleep.

She nods. Shifts the receiver to the other side. "He's asleep, sweetheart. Do you wanna leave a message?" She pauses. "He's awake. I'll hand it over." She holds out the receiver. "It's Tommy."

Steve's lived through many days without hearing Tommy's hyena cackle first thing in the morning. Steve misses those days. *"That Hargrove's mom? She sounds like a total babe."*

Steve rubs the sleep from his eyes. "Do you have any idea what time it is, shitbird?"

"Called to see if you two had killed each other yet," Tommy chirps merrily.

"Well, we haven't."

"Clearly." A pause. Tommy chews something disgustingly close to the receiver. *"So, how's the honeymoon going?"*

Steve is contemplating how to strangle Tommy through the phone line when Billy walks in.

He's shirtless- nothing new, really; something Steve's seen a million times before- but never when he's still sleep-drunk, donning an old pair of shorts and a bedhead. He looks- soft, which isn't a word Steve would use to describe Billy Hargrove regularly- but.

It stuns him, how much he wants it. Wants Billy.

Jesus.

"Steve-o? You OD over there?"

Steve shakes himself out of his stupor. "No, just-" He swallows. Allows himself to drink in the sight of Billy hobbling around the kitchen, smiling at his mother, drinking water straight from the faucet, laughing when Gwen chides him. God. "Billy walked in."

Billy looks up at the sound of his name. Blue eyes meet brown for a quarter of a second before they drop to Steve's t-shirt. It feels too big all of a sudden, like he's about to drown in it. Steve tugs it up by the collar. Billy's cologne hits him like a freight train.

"Of course he did." Steve hears Tommy's smirk from across the country. He's *this close* to taking the next flight to Indiana for the express purpose of murdering the guy. *"Hey, so I've been meaning to ask. Did you ever think of me that way?"*

Steve is so offended, he becomes speechless.

Tommy speaks through a mouthful of whatever junk he's shoving in his maw. *"Did Billy bend over?"*

"Fuck you."

"I'll pass."

"Fuck you."

"So Hargrove isn't putting out?"

Steve slams the receiver into the cradle, cutting off Tommy's manic laughter.

Billy leans against the table, polishing off a plate of still-sizzling bacon. Steve swipes a couple strips, darting out of Billy's reach.

Gwen smiles, cryptic. "So, what are you boys planning on getting up to today?"

"Thought we could go to the beach." Steve pilfers more bacon off of Billy, who only rolls his eyes. Gwen's smile grows. "Teach Stevie Nicks here how to surf."

Steve throws up a 'V'; affects a Californian accent. "Gonna catch some waves, bruh. Totally tubular." Billy looks scandalized.

Gwen's grin stretches from ear to ear. "You should show Steve around town, Billy; why don't you drop by Murray's? He'll love to see you again, honey- especially if Steve's with you."

"*Mom.*"

"I've never been to the West Coast before, actually," Steve interjects before Billy works himself up to a repeat performance of last night. "Billy will have to show me every inch."

Billy chokes on his orange juice, face gone scarlet. Steve rubs his back while he hacks up a lung; Billy gets redder.

"You good, man?" Steve asks.

Billy coughs into his fist. "Fuckin' peachy."

They fuck around until midday; Billy doing odd jobs around the house Gwen admits to forgetting to do herself. He's ridiculously attractive even when he's doing stupid, menial chores like fixing the leaky faucet in the bathroom, or patching up a couple of loose floorboards on the deck. Steve hovers by his side, useless for anything except handing over a wrench or a handful of nails when he's told. Partly because he can't tell a bevel from a billhook. Mostly because he's far more concerned with the way Billy's clothes stick to his body.

Gwen brings over lemonade and freshly squeezed orange juice- for Steve, too, even though he's not doing much to help out. Probably distracting Billy, in fact, with his incessant chatter. He finishes his

lemonade in guilty silence, sucking on the ice cubes until the inside of his mouth goes numb.

Billy hammers another nail into the wood. Steve idly entertains a fantasy of Billy hammering into him.

“You’re awfully quiet.” Billy looks up. Wipes a sheen of sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

“Hm?” Steve hollows his cheeks around the ice cube.

Billy takes a moment. “You stopped talking.”

“Miss the sound of my voice that much, darlin’?” Steve tacks on a greasy little grin for effect.

Billy returns the grin. Tongues his teeth. “Nah, thought you’d gotten heatstroke, ’s all. Now be a good little wife and hand me the pliers. Honey,” he adds, with a salacious wink.

And it’s- nice. It’s fun; shooting the shit with Billy on his mom’s porch, the Beach Boys playing on her record player. Steve shoots to his feet at *California Girls*, dancing around the deck while Billy splits his sides laughing, floorboards long forgotten.

“Well, East Coast girls are hip; I really dig those styles they wear.” He snaps his fingers, shakes his hips, inches closer to a Billy who’s desperately trying to get away. *“And the Southern girls with the way they talk; they knock me out when I’m down there.”*

Steve tries to haul Billy to his feet, but the man is two hundred pounds of pure muscle and stubbornness, and remains rooted to the spot. “I’m good, pretty boy. Prefer the view from here.”

Steve pouts. *“The Midwest farmer’s daughters really make you feel alright,”* he urges, pointing at himself. *“And the Northern girls, with the way they kiss, they keep their boyfriends warm at night.”*

He twirls and sashays; a bastardized belly dance. *“I wish they all could be California girls.”* His voice cracks, and he expects Billy to rag him for it. Instead, he spins around to see blue eyes burning into him.

A conversation he had at eighteen: *It's like before it's gonna storm. You can't see it, but you can feel it. Like this- electricity.*

Billy looks away. “Can’t believe I married a guy who listens to the Beach Boys.”

Steve fights a laugh. “I like Wham, too.”

Billy groans.



Turns out Steve can’t surf.

Billy can, though, and he’s pretty good. Not that Steve would be the best judge of that; he’s just parroting what the girls behind him are saying.

Right. There’s that.

Billy’s just as much of a heartthrob in LA as he is in Hawkins. Even more glorious, actually, when he’s in his element. Logically, Steve can hardly blame the girls for staring at him.

Pettily, Steve does.

“Wanna give it another go, pretty boy?” Surfboard under his arm, blond hair plastered to his face, board shorts hanging low on his hips-
Billy looks every bit like a movie star. “Last chance. It’s almost high tide.”

“I’m good.” Steve shades his eyes from the sun, and Billy’s smile. “Don’t want to embarrass myself again, thanks.”

Billy snorts. Doesn’t deny it. Steve can’t bring himself to stay mad. “Want shaved ice,” he says instead.

Billy arches a brow. “Ain’t stoppin’ you.”

“Don’t want to get up.”

“Fuckin’ princess,” Billy gripes, but he’s already off.

Steve settles back on his towel, smiling to himself. The smile dies when one of the girls behind him goes right after Billy. The brunette, with the doe eyes. Bright red bikini.

It’s hard to get a read on Billy’s facial expression from this distance, but Steve is a PhD holder in Billy Hargrove’s Body Language. His stance is loose. Relaxed. He’s happy.

They look good together; she’s the Natalie Wood to his James Dean. Just a couple of steps to the left and they’d be right at home in Hollywood.

Steve’s shaved ice is a rose-colored puddle by the time he gets it. “Was catchin’ up with Heather,” Billy explains.

Steve dribbles ice down his chin. “You know her?”

“Used to go to school together.” Billy flops down next to Steve, kicking up sand. Steve scooches over on the towel. “She invited us out tonight.”

“Both of us?”

“What, you got plans?”

Steve tries to push him back onto the sand. He barely budges. “Where?”

“This bar downtown.” Billy drags his fingers in the sand. “I can cancel if you want to.”

Steve pictures Billy with Heather, his hand on her hip, eyes on her lips. Tamps down the lump in his throat. “I’m game if you are.” Forces a sleazy grin. “Totally tubular, man.”

Billy shoves him. Steve goes down on his side, laughing, and spills the rest of his ice onto the sand. “My frappe,” he mourns.

“Fuckin’ princess.” Billy stands up. “I’ll get you another one, geez.”

“My hero!” Steve declares, and Billy goes a little pink.

He’s gone when Steve notices the dicks he’d drawn in the sand; one long and thick, with *BILLY* printed underneath, the smaller one labelled *STEVE*.

☒

Steve wears Billy’s ring.

He tells himself he’ll hold onto it just a little bit longer. Just for a while. It doesn’t have to mean anything.

He’s less inclined to believe himself the longer it stays in his possession.

It’s just- Billy never asks for it. He hasn’t given Steve’s back, either. Matter of fact, he hasn’t even mentioned the rings.

So, like. It’s a matter of bartering, see. Equal trade. Steve’s dad is a businessman. He knows about this stuff.

If Billy takes note of the ring, he says nothing. Steve is left relieved and crestfallen.

It’s stupid, he knows. It’s beyond that, in fact, to wish Billy would notice him the way he notices Billy. No one’s ever accused Steve of being smart, though, so. Stupid is as stupid does.

And he’d be hard-pressed to *not* notice Billy, tonight of all nights. The guy seems to have a sign screaming *LOOK AT ME* on regular days; tonight, it’s in flashing neon. Straight off the cover of one of those trashy romances Steve’s seen his mom read.

Jesus H.

“You boys have fun tonight,” Gwen tells them at the door. “I’ll be heading over to Wendy’s in a bit. The house is all yours for the night.”

She hugs Billy before they leave. Steve's surprised- and a little touched, too- when she hugs him as well.

The ring is a dead weight on Steve's finger all the way to the bar. He keeps expecting Billy to comment on it- worse, ask for it back. He does neither. Instead, Steve indulges him in a conversation about how much LA's changed since he'd moved to Hawkins.

Steve thinks of ever-stagnant Hawkins, and something deep inside him aches.

The bar is a hole-in-the-wall, out-of-the-way place downtown. *DIONYSIA*, proclaims the neon sign above the entrance.

Heather is already inside. "Hey, Bill!" she giggles, waving them over. "And you must be Steve!"

That's the extent of the acknowledgement Steve gets from her. It's not her fault in particular; it's just that Billy brings up how different LA is now, and Heather jumps on the topic, and Steve's hardly an ocean of knowledge on the subject. He sullenly nurses his tequila through *Tainted Love*, glares at the bottom of the glass for the duration of *I Feel Love*, and waves the bartender over at *Like a Record*.

Her lips twitch up. "Tough night?"

Steve's primary instinct is to snap at her to mind her own business. Steve tells that primary instinct to go to hell, because for one, she's the only person who's giving him the time of day, and two, she genuinely looks like she could snap his neck and have zero regrets doing so.

"Yeah," he admits. His gaze drifts to Billy and Heather again, who are now engaged in an animated conversation about... something.

The bartender nods. "Trouble in paradise?"

"I'm not with her," he blurts.

"Wasn't talking about her." Steve pales, and the bartender adds, "Takes one to know one." She displays a small pink triangle on her leather jacket (Billy would appreciate her commitment to fashion,

Steve reckons, if he could bear to tear his eyes away from Heather for one goddamn minute). “So. You guys dating, or fucking, or?”

“Married.” Steve displays the ring- Billy’s ring. “Vegas.”

She whistles. “And you weren’t doing any of the above before?”

Steve gulps. “The second. Uh. Well. In a roundabout way, I guess. We always had someone else with us.”

“And you two didn’t-” She makes a lewd gesture with her hands.

“On our wedding night.” She leans over the counter, interested. “Uh, I can’t remember much.” She slumps back. “We were drunk. Same as all the times before. I don’t always remember what happens when I get plastered. But I know we’ve kissed before. Probably didn’t go all the way until we got married, though.”

“Like good Christian boys.” Her grin is vicious; predatory. Billy would *love* her. “He remembers?”

Steve hunches in on himself. “Probably. He’s got a better memory than I do.”

“And you never talked about that night with him? Tried to fill in the blanks?” She stares at him like he’s stupid, which, fair, but, ouch. “Why you got hitched in the first place?”

Steve hunches further. “Does it matter? We’re getting divorced, anyway.”

(I want to break free, Freddie Mercury torments him over the speakers. I want to break free from your lies; you’re so self-satisfied; I don’t need you.

Steve really wishes he had that blender.)

“Your idea or his?”

“His.” He forces a laugh. “He doesn’t want me that way.”

She looks like she has a hard time believing him, but before Steve can

correct her (“He *really* doesn’t want me that way.”), Heather taps a bright red fingernail against the counter. “Baby, could you get us a round?”

“Comin’ right up, sugar-bun,” says the very female, very lesbian bartender; but not before throwing a shit-eating grin Steve’s way.

Billy finally, *finally* turns around in his seat. “What was that all about?” he asks, bemused.

But Steve’s not particularly listening because, because-

(I’ve fallen in love.)

The final piece of the puzzle falls into place. Steve looks at Billy, and remembers their wedding night- Billy tearing off his shirt, buttons flying all over the place; scooping Steve up in his arms like he’s weightless and setting him down on the mattress gently like he’s something precious; a female voice, disgruntled, asking, “*So you’re both just going to ignore me?*”

But Steve’s not particularly listening, because Billy’s looking at him in a way that makes everything so clear; he doesn’t even have to say it, but Steve remembers in perfect clarity- Billy inside him, all over him, and then he’s kissing three little words into Steve’s neck.

“*I love you,*” he’d said.

The Billy of the present stares at him now, mouth a little open, eyes swimming with concern. “You okay, pretty boy?”

(I’ve fallen in love for the first time.)

God. *God*, Steve feels like an idiot.

“*I love you, too,*” he blurts.

(And this time I know it’s for real.)

And he’d laugh at the way Billy’s eyes go wide, his mouth drops open all the way- except-

“Do you mean it?” he asks, and he sounds so unsure-

Steve takes a deep breath. “*It’s strange but it’s true,*” he sings, reedy. “*I can’t get over the way you love me like you do.*”

This time, when his voice cracks, Billy doesn’t laugh. He doesn’t stare.

Instead, he leans over and kisses Steve.

Steve gasps, hands coming up to tangle in Billy’s hair, and this time, for the first time, Billy doesn’t taste of alcohol. His arms find home around Steve, and they draw him impossibly closer.

Steve is the first to pull away, because he doesn’t have swimmer’s lungs like Billy does, and Billy’s mere existence has already robbed him of breath. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Billy smiles bashfully. “Didn’t think you’d ever want me back.”

Steve blinks. “*I can’t get used to living without you by my side; I don’t want to live alone.*”

Billy kisses him before his voice cracks.

Author’s Note:

- tag yourself, I’m the girl who came for a threesome but had to watch two Gay Bitches fuck instead
- how much respect would you lose for me if you knew how much Katy Perry I listened to while writing this
- geographical location and age have rendered me Unable to have paid a visit to Sin City or the City of Angels, so I offer you My Heartfelt Apologies if I’ve made any mistake regarding the All That.
- *throws heartfelt apologies at you like a monkey flinging poo*
- on [Twitter](#), I do the tweeting. on [Tumblr](#), I do the tumblring.